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ABSTRACT

The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, linguistic problems in the way of cooperation, language differences and the potential for discriminatory practice, and the need for a new linguistic order are discussed. It is suggested that misunderstandings arising from differences of language reduce the ability of the 35 cooperating states to promote health, education, nutrition, economic well-being, or the mutual understanding on which all these efforts depend. Problems of language manifest themselves in all areas of international cooperation. Not only is there the problem of simple comprehension but also the problem of discrimination: certain states enjoy marked linguistic advantages not shared by others. It is suggested that a neutral international language, easy to learn and to teach, could become the normal and accepted idiom of European, if not worldwide, communication. Esperanto, based on certain European languages, could be the international language to enable various states to treat one another on a nondiscriminatory and equal basis and to deal directly with their common problems. National languages could be preserved for internal use, and cultural pluralism could be elevated from principle to practice. Steps are recommended for using Esperanto to promote international cooperation through incorporation in the Final Act. (SW)

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LANGUAGE PROBLEMS AND THE FINAL ACT

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LANGUAGE PROBLEMS AND THE FINAL ACT

Commentary and Recommendations on the Implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

1. INTRODUCTION

On August 1, 1975, representatives of thirty-five states, meeting in Helsinki, put their signatures to the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Final Act was significant not only in the degree to which it recognized the need for the political stability of Europe but also in the extent to which it acknowledged the interdependence of the various nations of Europe. The various states pledged themselves to uphold common standards and to embark on an extensive programme of active cooperation.

In the first section of the Final Act, the states pledged respect for "each other's sovereign equality and individuality as well as all the rights inherent in and encompassed by [each other's] sovereignty". They renounced the use of force to settle disputes, they agreed to respect one another's frontiers and they promised also to respect "human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

In the second part of the Act, the states agreed to cooperate "in the field of economics, of science and technology and of the environment" and expressed their conviction that "the growing world-wide economic interdependence calls for increasing common and effective efforts towards the solution of major world economic problems such as food, energy, commodities, monetary and financial problems." They called for the improvement of exchanges of information, and they stressed the need for scientific cooperation to improve "the conditions of human life." This section of the Act called for the promotion of tourism, and stressed also the need to address the problems of migrant workers, including their linguistic problems.

After a third section relating to security and cooperation in the Mediterranean, a fourth section addressed cooperation in humanitarian and other fields, empha-

sizing the desire of the signatories "to contribute to the strengthening of peace and understanding among peoples and to the spiritual enrichment of the human personality without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." Such contributions could take place, the document suggested, through the facilitation of foreign travel, the improvement of conditions for tourism, meetings among young people, and so on. The states went on to express their aim "to facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds," and to make the publications of other signatories more easily available to their citizens. They stressed the value of cultural exchanges and the reciprocal enrichment of one another's cultural life. In particular they emphasized unity in diversity: the development of common cultural values in the context of respect for cultural pluralism. In this last connection, they pledged respect also for national minorities and regional cultures.

The fourth section went on to consider education. Pledging cooperation in the field of education, the various states stressed "that the development of relations of an international character in the fields of education and science contributes to a better mutual understanding." Calling for such cooperation at all levels, they expressed their conviction "that progress in these fields should be accompanied and supported by a wider knowledge of foreign languages." This last statement was given concrete expression in an extensive passage dealing with the study of foreign languages and civilizations – "paying due attention to less widely-spread or studied languages." A greater range of choice in foreign-language learning, the improvement of teaching methods, teaching languages to adults, and cooperation in language teaching methods were all mentioned as areas for attention.

A final section of the report suggested that follow-up meetings of representatives of the signatories be held to review progress in the implementation of the Final Act and to plan future cooperation. The first such meeting was fixed for Belgrade in 1977, with a preparatory session in that city in June 1977. The present document is intended as a contribution to the debate at the Belgrade meeting. The Final Act draws attention to the need for non-governmental organizations to contribute to the cooperation envisaged in the Act, and it suggests various ways in which the work of NGO's might be facilitated to that end. As a major non-governmental organization, in consultative relations with Unesco, the Universal Esperanto Association offers the following commentary and recommendations on the implementation of the Final Act. It draws attention particularly to the need for vigorous action to improve the linguistic situation among the various states, since without adequate means of linguistic communication, cooperation is bound to be deficient or non-existent.

2. LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS IN THE WAY OF COOPERATION

A great deal of the success of the Final Act depends on an awareness of the cultural diversity of the continent of Europe – a continent made up not only of nation-states of varying history and values but also containing numerous cultural minorities, languages of limited distribution and peoples linked by a common cultural heritage yet separated by political boundaries. Cultural pluralism might be regarded as one of the premises of the entire document.

At the same time the document suggests that there exist certain standards of general applicability (in the field of human rights, for example) and that it is in the mutual self-interest of the various countries to cooperate with one another in fields as diverse as commerce and education, science and tourism, environment, technology, sport. Such cooperation, it is suggested, should occur not only at the level of states

and official bodies, but among educational institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and individual citizens.

A constant barrier in the way of such cooperation is of course that of language. Among the thirty-five signatories of the Final Act there are almost thirty-five official national languages, to say nothing of the numerous local languages and dialects of minorities within those states. While the knowledge of foreign languages among diplomats and intellectuals may hold out promise of productive cooperation among governments or certain scientific or educational establishments, cooperation unhampered by language barriers becomes less and less possible the more one concentrates on cooperation among the ordinary citizens of the countries in question. The difficulties here are well known. Experience with tourism has shown that the benefits in mutual understanding between nations, or the extent of direct contact between visitors and natives, are often very minimal. In the ordinary civic life of ordinary citizens, full understanding of other nations or appreciation of their problems is rare – principally because it is difficult not only to make contact with those in other countries but also to benefit from these contacts, given differences of language.

That the signatories were aware of these serious obstacles in the way of ordinary cooperation is evident from their particular stress on foreign language instruction. While such concern with linguistic communication is commendable, it cannot be denied that the massive investment of the various states in foreign-language instruction has not always brought the benefits hoped for. Even in countries where such instruction is compulsory, the extent of knowledge is often slight, and most people grow up without a working knowledge of a single foreign language. And with thirty-five or so to choose from in Europe and North America alone, even a working knowledge of a single foreign language does not necessarily solve the problem for the ordinary citizen.

If international cooperation among ordinary citizens is severely hampered by language differences, such language problems are far from lacking even among intellectuals and official representatives of states. The text of the Final Act itself caused a good deal of difficulty because of the fact that it had to be produced in six languages, each of the six having equal official status. And in the deliberations of the many official bodies and international organizations to whom the states look for the implementation of many of their recommendations, language problems are an everyday phenomenon. At the United Nations, the Translation Division occupies some 491 persons and costs over $13 million a year to run. The Interpretation Division consumes a further $8 million per annum and employs 181 persons. The World Health Organization, confronted with the officialization of Arabic and Chinese in 1975, calculated that this would add $5 million to its annual budget – or enough to prevent ten million cases of trachoma, one of the commonest causes of blindness. The European Communities, with six official languages, employ twenty-five percent of their entire personnel in their language services.

Perhaps these costs would be acceptable if the final result were as though differences of language did not exist. But in fact such language differences affect informal contacts across national boundaries too. An official in the Ministry of Education in the Netherlands can dial his counterpart in the Hungarian Ministry of Education directly, such are the advances in technology in recent years. But there is no guarantee that they will have the means to communicate. Paris can talk with Moscow, Prague with Athens, London with Madrid – but their level of communication is likely to be low. Since the Final Act calls for the kind of active cooperation that requires daily contacts among literally thousands of civil servants in the thirty-

five states – and not just at the highest level but at middle levels too (and even at the level of clerical staff) – language problems are bound to hamper, often to extreme degrees, the evolution of this cooperation.

Every dollar spent on translation and interpretation is a dollar taken away from the fight against disease, or illiteracy, or hunger, or economic depression. And every misunderstanding arising from differences of language reduces the ability of the thirty-five states to promote health, or education, or nutrition, or economic well-being – or the mutual understanding on which all these efforts depend.

3. LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION

Echoing the Charter of the United Nations, the thirty-five signatories of the Final Act stressed their respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms "without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." Race and racism are issues that have required legislation and social action in the territories of many of the states in question. Sexual equality, too, has been the subject of a great deal of attention in recent years. Although religious equality is guaranteed by the constitutions of many of the thirty-five, religious problems continue to threaten the social fabric both in Europe and in other parts of the world. Several states have also grappled with problems of language, and it is significant that the thirty-five states have pledged themselves to respect the languages and cultures of minority peoples within their borders.

In practice the maintenance of equality of education, equality of opportunity, and economic justice for all citizens, regardless of the language they speak, is no easy task. It involves measures to provide good educational services for minorities, to protect and establish cultural institutions, to provide adequate communications media, and to ensure equality before the law and access to political processes. But it is noteworthy that these are problems that the various states are willing to confront.

By their emphasis on cultural pluralism, here and in such bodies as Unesco, and by their efforts to promote the use of their languages abroad, many states recognize the importance of the linguistic rights not only of cultural minorities but also of entire states. The European Community, for example, accords the six national languages of the nine member-states equal recognition, thereby carrying into effect, as best it can, the principle of non-discrimination among languages.

There can surely be no doubt that where this principle does not hold, where the various languages are not treated as equal, the smaller languages are at a considerable disadvantage. Sending their experts to international conferences, or to the United Nations, the smaller states must consider not only the expertise of those in question but also their linguistic ability, for they must compete in debate with those who speak the official languages as their native languages, and they must negotiate in languages foreign to them. Such problems of language manifest themselves in all areas of international cooperation. Not only is there the problem of simple comprehension but also the problem of discrimination: certain states enjoy marked linguistic advantages not shared by others. Even efforts to overcome these problems, by education, for example, place a disproportionate burden on certain states.

The principle of non-discrimination on grounds of language, so boldly stated in the preamble to the Final Act – and already formulated in the U.N. Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Declaration of Human Rights, and so on – stands in direct opposition, at least potentially, to the actual carrying

out of the cooperation envisaged in the remainder of the document. It is hard for us to believe that such cooperation will be carried forward in a spirit of linguistic equality, for while this principle is recognized to a greater or lesser extent within states, it is seldom applied in the relations among states. And this practice is obviously at variance with the principle of human rights to which the thirty-five states are signatories. Hence not only are differences of language expensive, not only do they generate inefficiency; they also contain opportunities for discriminatory practice of the most elementary kind.

4. THE NEED FOR A NEW LINGUISTIC ORDER

Those familiar with international affairs, even though they are better equipped than most to deal with them, tend to regard language problems rather as most of us regard a rainy day: it hampers our mobility, but we grit our teeth and put up our umbrellas. That there is something that can be done about linguistic diversity, other than learning as many languages as possible, does not seem to occur to most of us, or, if it does, it is rejected as unrealistic.

Given the extent to which linguistic difficulties hamper the fulfilment of international cooperation and the degree to which language is a cause of discrimination, such fatalism may be less than wholly responsible conduct. We are dealing here not with a small and isolated inconvenience but with an international problem of such pervasiveness that it hinders all our efforts to deal with the other many problems with which the world must, inevitably, grapple. At the very least, a concerted effort should be made to explore the extent of language difficulties and to come up with solutions adequate to the problem.

For centuries people have dreamed of the creation of an international language, to serve as a means of cummunication among the various national languages of the world. Many, including some of the world's greatest thinkers, have addressed themselves to the problem. But always what has prevented the realization of their dreams is not the creation of a linguistically acceptable idiom but the promotion of this idiom in preference to others, or the convincing of enough people that an international language is a realizable possibility.

One such proposal has, however, gone beyond the stage of a project and become a full-blown language. In 1887, in Warsaw, Ludovic Zamenhof published a booklet out of which has grown the modern language of Esperanto. Based originally on certain European languages, Esperanto has today surpassed its origins to become a truly international language spoken by many thousands of people in countries from Portugal to Japan and from Finland to Australia. Modern Esperanto dictionaries contain as many as 15,000 roots from which no less than a hundred thousand words can be formed, major literary works have been translated into Esperanto, and there are literally thousands of original works of literature in the language, along with scientific texts, children's literature, numerous periodicals, and textbooks. Thousands of Esperanto-speakers travel to a hundred or more international meetings each year. Some fifteen thousand children learn Esperanto each year in schools, many of them in the territories of the signatories of the Final Act. Hence there is an extensive literature on the pedagogy of Esperanto and, in the countries where formal examinations exist, there are qualified teachers.

This vast cultural activity, perhaps because it is carried on in a different language, is little known in the outside world. Nonetheless, in 1954 the General Conference of

Unesco noted "the results attained by Esperanto in the field of international intellectual relations and in the rapprochement of the peoples of the world" and recognized that "these results correspond with the aims and ideals of Unesco." In 1959 the Executive Board of Unesco decided that Ludovic Zamenhof should be commemorated as one of the great personalities of mankind.

While the adoption of Esperanto as a means of international communication has been met with a measure of scepticism in some circles, the problem of language, and the degree to which language differences hinder the promotion of genuine international cooperation do seem to demand that no stone be left unturned, no potential solution be ignored, in the search for an equitable and lasting solution. A neutral international language, easy to learn and easy to teach, could in a matter of a few years become the normal and accepted idiom of European, if not world-wide, communication. Belonging to no nation and free of specific identification with any state, its use would at once remove national linguistic rivalries from the business of international bodies. Its relative ease of acquisition would open up international life to many millions who cannot now enjoy it, and it would reduce the financial burden on educational systems. Of course there would still be scope for the learning of foreign languages, but we would be less dependent on such remedies. Above all, the various states could treat with one another on a non-discriminatory and equal basis, and tackle directly their common problems. As for their national languages, they would be preserved for internal use, and cultural pluralism would be elevated from principle to practice.

The fact that Esperanto does not seem to have figured in the deliberations on international cooperation out of which grew the Final Act is distressing. We urge that the matter be given an adequate hearing. To that end we propose certain specific steps, contained in the ensuing recommendations.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That steps be taken to examine the implications of the equal treatment of languages pledged in Section 1 (a) VII of the opening chapter of the Final Act;
2. That efforts be made to assess the role of language differences as a limiting factor on the various types of cooperation envisaged by the Final Act;
3. That the claims of the International Language Esperanto as a mode of communication among the thirty-five signatories be fully examined, and that experiments be conducted to establish its feasibility (se also the resolution contained in Appendix 1);
4. That efforts be undertaken to remove barriers to the teaching of Esperanto in the schools of the various states, and that positive action be taken to train teachers and to develop teaching aids and methodology;
5. That assistance be given to the promotion of publications in and on Esperanto, to the increase of radio broadcasts in Esperanto, to the use of Esperanto in tourism, and to youth exchanges through Esperanto;
6. That the promotion of foreign language instruction in the various states, pledged in Chapter Four of the Final Act, be widened to include the International Language Esperanto.

APPENDIX ONE

Resolution of the Committee of the Universal Esperanto Association

addressed to the European Conference on Security and Co-operation

The Committee of the Universal Esperanto Association, being the highest decision-making body in the Association, meeting at the 60th Universal Congress of Esperanto in Copenhagen, and following the work of the European Conference on Security and Co-operation with its fullest interest and support,

NOTING

1. that the ever-growing problem of the multiplicity of languages seriously hampers the development of that freer and wider co-operation which is the aim of the Conference, as witness the complications encountered in preparing identical versions of the Conference resolution in six languages;

2. that the same language problem is particularly acute in the field of personal and unofficial relations, to the significance of which the Conference is devoting special attention;

3. that an equable and adequate solution of this problem guaranteeing equal rights can be attained only through the general adoption of a planned international language, as has been demonstrated for decades by the functioning of the International Language Esperanto in all fields of application;

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the resolution on the same subject adopted by the 58th World Esperanto Congress in Belgrade in 1973,

PROPOSES

that the committee of governmental experts set up to monitor the execution of the decisions of the Conference give positive consideration to the steps already undertaken to make use of Esperanto in social, political and scientific areas (parliaments, political parties, trade unions, universities) and contribute to the furthering of those efforts on as wide a scale as possible.

Copenhagen, 30 July 1975

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